United Nations A/C.5/54/SR.10

General Assembly
Fifty-fourth session

Official Records

Distr.: General
26 November 1999

Original: English

Fifth Committee

Summary record of the 10th meeting
Held at Headquarters, New York, on Tuesday, 19 October 1999, at 3 p.m.

Chairman: Mr. Wensley ..... (Australia)
Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions: Mr. Mselle

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Agenda item 125: Scale of assessments for the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations (*continued*) (A/54/11)

1. **Ms. Lopez** (Philippines), speaking on behalf of the member States of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), said that, given the different levels of development of its Member States, the Organization would always be dependent on a handful of its Members for its financing. Any review of the scale methodology should build upon the broad political consensus that already existed and any changes to the scale should not increase the financial burden on developing countries. The principle of capacity to pay should remain the fundamental criterion for the apportionment of the Organization's expenses. At its fifty-fourth session, the General Assembly should provide guidance to the Committee on Contributions on the various elements of the scale methodology for the preparation of the scale for the period 2001-2003 and should not repeat the decision taken at its fifty-first session, when the Committee on Contributions had been asked to prepare eight different scales.

2. Concerning the elements of the scale methodology, future scales should be based on estimates of GNP as a first approximation of a Member State's capacity to pay. The base period for calculation of the scale of assessments should realistically reflect a country's capacity to pay. In that regard a longer base period provided stability and predictability and avoided extreme variations from one scale period to the other. The current six-year base period should provide a basis for consensus. ASEAN supported the use of market exchange rates for purposes of the scale.

3. The debt-burden adjustment continued to provide relief to many developing countries and should be retained in any future scale methodology. In determining the debt-burden adjustment, the "debt stock" approach was preferable. The members of ASEAN also believed that the low per capita income adjustment should remain an integral part of the scale methodology and supported the proposal that the level of the gradient should again be increased to 85 per cent. They did not share the view, however, that a sliding gradient for Member States below the threshold would best reflect the capacity to pay of Member States.

4. Any reduction in the ceiling would be a further departure from the principle of capacity to pay and result in an unacceptable transfer of financial burden to many developing countries. ASEAN supported the recommendation of the Committee on Contributions to retain the floor rate at 0.001 per cent and the ceiling at 0.01 per cent for the least developed countries.

5. Annual recalculation of the scale of assessments would be disruptive and lead to renegotiation of the scale each year. Once agreed upon, the scale should be valid for a period of three years and should not be revised unless the capacity to pay of Member States had changed significantly.

6. ASEAN strongly rejected the notion that the scale of assessments had caused the continuing financial crisis faced by the United Nations. The primary cause of the crisis was the late payment or non-payment of assessed contributions by some Member States, and in particular by the major contributor. Payment of assessed contributions in full, on time and without conditions was the only viable solution to the Organization's financial crisis. In considering the various proposals that had been made to encourage Member States to honour their obligations under the Charter, however, the Assembly should be sensitive to the plight of Member States which were experiencing genuine economic difficulties.

7. The loss of voting rights was the only sanction available against Member States which defaulted on their legal and financial obligations to the Organization. While it was the General Assembly's prerogative to take decisions on requests by Member States for exemption to the application of Article 19 of the Charter, the Assembly should be able to benefit from the technical advice of the Committee on Contributions before action was taken on such requests. It was therefore regrettable that that Committee had been unable to recommend practical ways in which it could consider requests for exemption in a timely manner when not in session. In the view of ASEAN, the General Assembly should authorize the Committee on Contributions to hold a special session when the situation so warranted.

8. **Mr. Fox** (Australia), speaking on behalf of Canada, Australia and New Zealand, said that the methodology of any new scale of assessments must be based on capacity to pay and be simpler and more transparent. The current scale did not fully reflect developments in the world economy over the past 15 years and certain of its elements needed to be modified. The scale should reflect current rather than past economic realities and a shorter base period was therefore more appropriate.

9. With regard to conversion rates, the Committee on Contributions should strictly limit the use of price-adjusted rates of exchange to the most serious cases; where Member States had pegged their exchange rates to the United States dollar, those fixed rates should be used. Should the debt-

burden adjustment be retained, it should be based on the debt flow rather than on the debt stock approach.

10. The low per capita income adjustment deserved close attention in any review of the scale methodology. While the contention that countries with per capita incomes lower than the world average should continue to receive relief could not be disputed, the extent of that relief and the distribution of the ensuing burden needed to be reviewed. Calculation of the low per capita income adjustment should involve the reduction of total assessable income by the amount of the adjustment, rather than its reallocation to other Member States, in order to bring the method into line with the other adjustments in the scale methodology and to share the cost of adjustment among all Member States.

11. Delays in assigning points to Member States moving above the threshold would be unfair to those States which had experienced discontinuity in the past without any such relief. The level of the gradient should be reduced from the current level of 80 per cent and the Committee on Contributions should further examine the proposal to address the situation of those countries for which the current low per capita income formula reduced their rate of assessment by more than 50 per cent of their share of world gross national product (GNP).

12. The principle of capacity to pay was also skewed by the provision for a maximum assessment rate, which conferred a benefit on the wealthiest contributor and placed the resulting burden on others. That situation seemed especially inequitable as many States currently paid a floor rate in excess of their capacity to pay. Any further reduction in the ceiling would therefore seriously obscure the relationship between the amount to be paid and actual capacity to pay, to the point where the continuing relevance of the principle of capacity to pay would have to be questioned. While the countries on whose behalf he spoke had no objection in principle to a review of the ceiling, or indeed of the peacekeeping scale, they believed that arguments about movements in the ceiling should be made on their merits, without linkages to other issues and with due regard to possible effects on other Member States, including other large contributors. While over-reliance on any one contributor was not healthy, unilateral determination of individual assessments was also unacceptable.

13. The idea of annual recalculation of the scale of assessments was of particular importance, since it would ensure that contemporary realities were reflected in the scale and thus be of great assistance to countries in financial crisis as they worked to reinvigorate their economies. It would be one tangible way in which the scale of assessments could reflect large currency fluctuations or sudden, calamitous events.

14. With regard to the procedural aspects of the consideration of requests for exemption under Article 19, at issue were the effectiveness and viability of Article 19 of the Charter. The General Assembly had been urged to adopt a range of measures to act as incentives for prompt payment of assessed contributions and as disincentives and penalties for those Member States that failed to honour their legal obligations. Agreement had not been reached on those measures and the only encouragement for prompt payment therefore remained Article 19, which should be applied particularly during the period of maximum General Assembly activity between September and December each year.

15. In dealing with the procedural aspects of requests for waivers, the Fifth Committee had in recent times taken a piecemeal approach, including the granting of waivers without seeking advice from the expert body which had been created by the General Assembly specifically for that purpose. The Committee on Contributions needed to reflect on the appropriate course of action for dealing with applications for waivers, including the timing of its meetings in New York, in order to be in a position to provide advice to the General Assembly. The proposal by the Chairman of the Committee on Contributions that the Fifth Committee should specify a time-frame for the submission of requests for exemption under Article 19 should be considered by the Fifth Committee at the current session. The Fifth Committee must avoid taking decisions that undermined Article 19.

16. Lastly, the Committee on Contributions should continue its consideration of technical measures to improve the financial situation of the Organization. One of the key issues was the timing of the application of Article 19 and, in that connection, the delegations on whose behalf he spoke were of the view that the 30-day deadline should be consistently applied for the purposes of Article 19.

17. **Ms. Dinic** (Croatia) said that capacity to pay should be the fundamental principle applied in the calculation of the scale of assessments. In order to reflect the current capacity to pay of Member States, a shorter base period of three years would be more appropriate. The question of annual recalculation of the scale of assessments should also be given further consideration.

18. Croatia was aware of the negative impact of indebtedness on a Member State's capacity to pay and therefore supported the retention of the debt-burden adjustment based on the debt flow approach as one of the elements of the scale methodology. The low per capita

income adjustment was another important element of the scale. While her delegation might support a reduction, the current level of the gradient at 80 per cent seemed appropriate. Croatia also supported the proposal to maintain the minimum assessment rate at 0.001 per cent, although the application in the future scale of the maximum assessment rate for the least developed countries should be reconsidered.

19. The Committee should consider ways to strengthen the procedure provided for in Article 19 of the Charter. In the meantime, however, the existing procedure should be respected so as to ensure equal treatment for all Member States and mechanisms should be established to deal in an orderly manner with applications outside the regular procedure. All Member States intending to request permission to vote under Article 19 should do so before that Committee's regular session.

20. Concerning the measures which had been proposed by the Committee on Contributions to encourage the timely, full and unconditional payment of assessed contributions, broader discussions were needed among members of the Fifth Committee and further studies should be carried out by the Committee on Contributions before the proposed measures were implemented.

21. **Mr. Mahbubani** (Singapore) said that the real point at issue in the discussions concerning the apportionment of the expenses of the United Nations was not money but commitment to the Organization. After an absence from the United Nations of 10 years, he had been surprised to find that the debate over scales of assessment had become even more acrimonious than it had been before, all sides involved having adopted still more entrenched positions. In order to arrive at a consensus it was necessary to engage in building trust, and the first move had to be made by the largest contributor, the United States of America, whose continued arrears to the United Nations had contributed to the climate of distrust. But it was necessary for all sides to exercise restraint, since the loser, in the battle over scales of assessment, was the United Nations itself.

22. The only viable long-term solution was to find clear and simple formulas based on the original principle of capacity to pay, the main indicator of which was a country's gross national product. Due consideration had to be given to the low per capita income allowance, and to retaining the floor rate at 0.001 per cent and the ceiling for the least developed countries at 0.01 per cent. As the Committee on Contributions had indicated, the proposal for annual recalculation of assessments would only complicate matters further.

23. It should be remembered that contributions to the regular budget of the United Nations corresponded to a small proportion, 0.0036 per cent, of the global GNP as estimated by the World Bank. That was surely not a large financial outlay for countries whose leaders had consistently declared their commitment to the United Nations.

24. One problem was the fact that even though, according to one estimate, seven countries contributed over 75 per cent of the budget while 100 States contributed only 0.43 per cent, the larger contributors were obliged to abide by the principle of one country, one vote when it came to decisions concerning the budget. However, any violation of that principle would violate the principle of sovereign equality on which the United Nations Charter was based. The same principle of one person, one vote was widely accepted in most democracies, even though some voters paid more taxes than others.

25. Nevertheless, within democratic countries, the reality was also more complex since the rich had more influence on national decisions than the poor, and the same was true in the United Nations. In one respect, however, the United Nations Charter had made an exception to the principle of sovereign equality by granting the veto to the permanent members of the Security Council, thereby recognizing the inequality of States by giving effect to the principle that the most powerful and important States had special status in international organizations. Thus, the permanent members of the Security Council had a much greater say in the selection of the Secretary-General.

26. In most institutions and organizations there was some correlation between privilege and responsibility; while, admittedly, the permanent members of the Security Council paid more to the peacekeeping budget, they did not contribute more to the regular budget. There was, however, a case for making at least one of the permanent members, the United States of America, pay more rather than less to the United Nations.

27. While delegations could continue to disagree about how much each country should contribute to the United Nations there would be little progress in the Fifth Committee unless there was agreement that the first task was to engage in building trust. All States had to reaffirm their common commitment to the United Nations and their adherence to the simple principle of capacity to pay. Once that commitment had been re-established, agreement could be reached on how much should be paid, if only because the sums involved were relatively small.

28. **Mr. Ko** (Myanmar) said that, despite the fact that 117 Member States had paid in full their regular assessments for 1998 and all prior years, as at mid-1999 the Organization had still been owed some $2.5 billion, primarily because of the failure of some Member States, and of the major contributor in particular, to fulfil their financial obligations. It was that failure rather than the current scale methodology that had caused the financial difficulties with which the Organization was faced. It was imperative that all Member States fulfilled their legal obligation to bear their share of the expenses of the Organization as apportioned by the General Assembly in accordance with the fundamental criterion of capacity to pay.

29. **Mr. Soulama** (Burkina Faso) said that his delegation associated itself with the statement made previously by Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. While his delegation fully supported the use of measures to encourage the timely, full and unconditional payment of assessed contributions, it was concerned that the effect of those outlined in the report might be the opposite of what was intended and that they might penalize a number of developing countries. It was well known, for example, that certain developing countries that were in financial difficulties contributed troops to the United Nations, thus demonstrating their commitment to the Organization. It was unacceptable that the reimbursement of troop contributors should be made subject to the payment of contributions by those countries. The same applied to the proposed measures relating to recruitment and procurement. Such measures would violate the underlying principles of the United Nations by creating a hierarchy among Member States seeking reimbursement or posts within the Organization.

30. The fundamental principle of capacity to pay had constantly been reaffirmed by the General Assembly as the criterion for determining the contribution of each Member State. His own country, even though it was one of the least developed countries, made the necessary effort to pay its assessments as it considered that that was a basic obligation of all Member States. Moreover, it was unacceptable for any Member State to seek to set its assessment unilaterally.

31. Article 19 of the Charter should remain the only means of encouraging Member States to meet their financial obligations, although any State that was in arrears because it faced particular difficulties should be granted an exemption as provided for in that Article.

32. Any solution to the current financial crisis required good faith on all sides. It was essential to respect the provisions of the Charter, and his delegation would not support any measures which might adversely affect his country's legitimate interests.

33. **Mr. Monayair** (Kuwait) said that the main reason for the financial crisis facing the United Nations was not the methodology currently used for apportioning assessed contributions but the failure of some Member States, over many years, to pay their contributions to the budget in full, on time and without conditions. That meant that the impact of any change in the methodology was limited. Member States should give priority to displaying the political will to pay their contributions in full. His country had been among the first Member States to discharge all its financial obligations.

34. The main criterion for determining assessments was a State's capacity to pay. In order for the methodology used to be more accurate, equitable and transparent, it must take account of economic circumstances and factors that had an impact on capacity to pay, including the requirements of development; no increases in the contributions of the developing countries should be made in order to reduce the assessments of the developed countries. His delegation hoped that specific recommendations would emerge concerning a new scale of assessments for the period 2001-2003 to serve as a starting point for consultations between the various groups.

Agenda item 124: Pattern of conferences (*continued*) (A/53/833 and Add.1 and 2; A/54/7, A/54/32, A/54/176, A/54/208, A/54/221 and A/54/262)

35. **Mr. Barnwell** (Guyana), speaking on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, noted that the overall utilization of conference services in New York in 1998 had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent and that the pattern had been similar in Geneva and Vienna. In that connection he expressed appreciation for the inclusion of meeting statistics for the United Nations Office at Nairobi, which, as the only United Nations centre in the developing world, should have the same status as the United Nations Offices at Geneva and Vienna. He expressed concern at the low number of meetings held at the United Nations Office at Nairobi and emphasized the need for the establishment of a permanent interpretation service there.

36. With regard to the format of documentation and reports, the Group of 77 and China noted with concern that the relevant provisions of General Assembly resolutions 52/214 B and resolution 53/208 B were not being fully implemented and emphasized the importance of full implementation of General Assembly resolutions and decisions by the Secretariat and expert bodies. He requested

clarification of the reasons for non-compliance, and reiterated the Group's reluctance to consider reports not submitted in compliance with the relevant General Assembly decisions.

37. The Group of 77 and China expressed deep concern at the chronic problem of delay in the issuance of documentation and reiterated the need for compliance with the six-week rule, which was particularly important for small delegations in order to give them ample time to consider reports. Those delegations also stressed the need to strengthen the Distribution Section and expressed concern at the fact that some publications were no longer issued in all the official languages, and at the continued high rate of self-revision during peak workload periods. The Group of 77 and China requested the Secretariat to make efforts to ensure the timely submission of documents.

38. The Group of 77 and China emphasized the need for public information material to be issued in all official languages on the United Nations Web site as soon as possible in accordance with resolutions 52/204 and 53/208 and requested information from the Secretariat on the implementation of those resolutions. The Group also noted with deep concern the further reduction in resources proposed for the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the biennium 2000-2001 and found it difficult to understand the rationale for such reductions.

39. In conclusion, in order to avoid further unbalancing the rate of utilization of conference services and facilities at the different duty stations, the Group of 77 and China emphasized that all United Nations bodies and organs must abide by the headquarters rule and, in that connection, called upon the Committee on Conferences to consider each request for an exception to that rule carefully before authorizing it.

40. **Mr. Kuindwa** (Kenya), speaking on behalf of the member States of the East African Cooperation, Kenya, the United Republic of Tanzania and Uganda, said that the delegations of those countries fully associated themselves with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

41. It was pleasing to note that the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/54/32) covered activities at all the United Nations centres, in New York, Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi, unlike past reports which had made only passing references to some of those centres. He expressed disappointment, however, that very little progress had been made with respect to the utilization of the conference facilities at Nairobi; it was absurd that of the 137 meetings scheduled for 2000, only two were to be held at Nairobi and that the figures were substantially the same for 2001. The neglect of the conference facilities at Nairobi was particularly unacceptable since the United Nations Office at Nairobi — the only United Nations centre in the developing world — was located in the capital of one of the member States of the East African Cooperation and hosted the headquarters of two important programmes, the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and Habitat, which dealt with issues that were of central interest to mankind and that lay at the core of sustainable development.

42. It was ironic that UNEP had become a victim of its own success. Numerous international treaties and conventions in the field of the environment had been adopted under its auspices but the secretariats of those instruments now met in various locations throughout the world and not at UNEP headquarters in Nairobi.

43. He welcomed the proposal to establish a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi and endorsed the view reflected in paragraph 45 of the report of the Committee on Conferences that, by holding one of its sessions at the United Nations Office at Nairobi, the Committee would draw attention to the problems faced by duty stations away from Headquarters and set an example for other intergovernmental bodies to emulate. The concern expressed by some delegations regarding the costs involved for the transportation and subsistence of delegations in Nairobi was not convincing; such an initiative would demonstrate a political commitment to address a problem which had been clearly identified but for which no substantive solution had been proposed. Similarly, the argument that an interpretation service could not be established in Nairobi because it did not have enough meetings to sustain it was fallacious; a similar argument had not been raised with respect to the establishment of comparable services in Geneva and Vienna.

44. The problems related to career development and vacancy rates in language services provided one of the keys to resolving the problems at the Nairobi Office. He looked forward to the Secretary-General's report, to be submitted to the General Assembly at the main part of the current session, which was to contain concrete proposals on a system of managed assignments based on career incentives and aimed at reducing the excessive vacancy rates at some duty stations, and hoped that the situation of Nairobi would be adequately addressed in that report.

45. Referring to the review of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001 relating to the impact of economy measures on the delivery of mandated conference services, he shared the regret expressed in paragraph 145 of the report of the Committee on Conferences (A/54/32) that

the current format of the proposed programme budget did not allow budget proposals for conference services at the United Nations Office at Nairobi to be considered by that Committee. He endorsed the proposal that conference services at Nairobi should be integrated into the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services; the delegations of the East African Cooperation intended to make concrete proposals in that regard under the agenda item on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 2000-2001.

46. **Ms. Yoon Seong-Mee** (Republic of Korea) said that her delegation endorsed the revised draft calendar of conferences and meetings for 2000 recommended by the Committee on Conferences and agreed that every effort should be made to avoid simultaneous peak periods. It noted with appreciation that the overall utilization factor for 1998 had exceeded the benchmark of 80 per cent, but was concerned at the low utilization factor in some bodies and at the continued underutilization of conference facilities at Nairobi. It therefore supported the Committee's request for detailed proposals on the utilization of the Nairobi facilities.

47. The continuing high vacancy rate for language staff at small duty stations was another source of concern for her delegation. It noted the measures to make assignments away from Headquarters more attractive and awaited more concrete proposals from the Secretary-General. It hoped that the net reduction of 0.8 per cent in the overall level of resources proposed for the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services for the biennium 2000-2001 would be achieved through cost-saving and technological innovation; economy measures must not impair the delivery and quality of conference services.

48. **Ms. Marston** (Jamaica) said that her delegation aligned itself with the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China and applauded the work done by the Department of General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services, which ensured the efficient conduct of meetings and the dissemination of relevant information.

49. The innovative efforts to improve efficiency in the Department also warranted commendation, for they were important steps forward in the attempt to enhance the Organization's overall efficiency. Jamaica also welcomed the increased coordination between Headquarters and the Offices at Geneva, Vienna and Nairobi and the introduction of computer-assisted translation. However, much remained to be done to improve the quality of conference services.

50. Those bodies which fell consistently below the 80 per cent benchmark must be urged to improve their performance; she supported the proposals for the cancellation of meetings in good time and for more accurate forecasting of the number of meetings required.

51. The Organization must be equipped to perform the most important function of servicing intergovernmental meetings. However, the delivery of conference services had been severely effected by economy measures. The overall level of resources proposed for the Department for the biennium 2000-2001 reflected a net reduction of $3.5 million as a result of cost-saving. While Jamaica had always supported the reform measures it wished to be sure that the Department was not being stripped bare: the point might have been reached at which any further cuts might cause such problems as the late issuance of documents and the unavailability of full interpretation services for meetings of major groupings to become chronic. The Department had been able to balance a decline in resources and posts against a decline in workload, but an unexpected increase in demand could upset that balance.

52. The persistent underutilization of conference services at Nairobi was worrying, for all United Nations Offices must have the tools to function effectively. In an organization where parity and equality were of paramount importance it was unacceptable that the only Office in a developing country was not equipped to handle any increase in the use of its conference services. The Department of Economic and Social Affairs had requested services at Nairobi for the fifth expert group meeting on financial issues of Agenda 21, and other United Nations bodies and subsidiary organs must be persuaded to meet in Nairobi.

53. Noting the technical problems of remote interpretation, which required further study, she said that her delegation supported the creation of a permanent interpretation service at Nairobi, notwithstanding the cost, and looked forward to the report on alternative sources of funding.

54. **Mr. Hamidullah** (Bangladesh) said that Bangladesh strongly supported the recommendation of the Committee on Conferences that in planning the calendar of conferences and meetings every effort should be made to avoid simultaneous peak periods, and its recommendations on improved use of the facilities at Nairobi, the only United Nations Office in the developing world. Implementation of the Committee's recommendations on the problems of career development and vacancy rates in language services would be helpful in addressing those issues. He also agreed with the Committee that the adoption of new technologies, particularly the United Nations Web site, had benefited the Member States. Innovative arrangements such as off-site reporting for production of verbatim records and the

experiments with remote interpretation and video-conferencing were encouraging. The Secretariat should go forward with such imaginative ideas, provided that they were effective and efficient.

55. The late issuance of documents remained a source of concern. At the previous session his delegation had requested information as to whether delays were being caused by a substantial increase in requests from Member States. Resolution 53/208 B dealt with that matter and required effective implementation. If a document was late, the Secretariat should state the causes clearly, as recommended in paragraph 92 of the report of the Committee on Conferences. The growing imbalance in the personnel of language services was another area of concern. The Secretariat should note in particular the recommendation contained in paragraph 11 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/53/919/Add.2) concerning the need to give appropriate attention to a "mobility factor" in the careers of language staff.

56. **Mr. Ye Xuenong** (China) said that China welcomed the introductory statement by the Under-Secretary-General for General Assembly Affairs and Conference Services and endorsed the positive assessment of the Department's work offered by other delegations. It also endorsed the statement made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

57. The six official languages must receive equal treatment, including with respect to the United Nations Web site, where improvements were needed in search capabilities in particular. The same comment applied to the optical disk system.

58. The Office at Nairobi, the only one in a developing country, must have the same status as other United Nations Offices. Action should be taken to complete the Nairobi facilities and improve the utilization rate of conference services. China agreed with the views of the Committee on Conferences in that regard.

59. All Member States wanted the drafting and translation of documents to be improved. China reiterated the hope that the Secretariat would tighten its management rules and enhance the staff's sense of responsibility. The late distribution of documents was a long-standing problem: China welcomed the assurance of the Under-Secretary-General that coordination between the drafting departments and his Department had been improved and noted that delays were often caused by the late submission of documents for processing. The problem must be vigorously addressed, and the recommendation contained in paragraph 92 of the Committee's report (A/54/32) that the reasons for late submission of a report to conference services should be included in a footnote was therefore welcome.

60. The Department's work had a big impact on the smooth functioning of United Nations meetings, and in 2000 there would be many additional meetings. The Department must therefore be given full financial and human resources to cope with its heavy workload. However, the budget proposals for the biennium 2000-2001 indicated a net reduction of 0.8 per cent in the Department's resources. The Fifth Committee should address that point in its discussion of the budget proposals.

61. **Mr. Yamagiwa** (Japan) said that in general terms his delegation endorsed the conclusions and recommendations contained in the report of the Committee on Conferences. In particular, it welcomed the fact that the 80 per cent benchmark had been exceeded in 1998. However, that did not apply to meetings held in New York, despite the dramatic improvement in the performance of the Fifth Committee. His delegation therefore endorsed the intention of the Committee on Conferences to continue its consultations with the chairmen of bodies which had been consistently underutilizing conference services.

62. His delegation noted the reasons given by the Secretariat for delays in the issuance of documents. The problem required a more constructive approach and it was to be hoped that a reaffirmed request by the General Assembly that the reasons for late submission of a report should be included in a footnote would be implemented.

63. The Secretary-General should certainly finalize his proposals on the system of managed assignments by the end of the main part of the current session, for the system would enhance the career prospects of language staff and improve the functioning of conference services away from Headquarters. However, the system should be considered from a wider perspective since high vacancy rates were found at most non-Headquarters duty stations and were not confined to conference services. His delegation would be grateful if that observation could be drawn to the attention of the Office of Human Resources Management.

64. **Mr. Nakkari** (Syrian Arab Republic) said that his delegation supported the statement that had been made by the representative of Guyana on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. He welcomed the participation of a number of Member States as observers at meetings of the Committee on Conferences and hoped that their attendance would become an established practice of the Committee, particularly as the provision of conference services was a joint responsibility of the Secretariat, the Committee on Conferences and the Member States.

65. His delegation noted that the report of the Secretary-General on the provision of interpretation services to meetings of regional and other major groupings of Member States (A/54/208) mentioned that the needs of regional meetings had not been fully met in spite of the capacity of the Secretariat to meet them in full.

66. Referring to the report of the Secretary-General on the possibility of establishing a permanent interpretation service at the United Nations Office at Nairobi (A/54/262), he said that his delegation did not agree with what was said in paragraph 9 of that document concerning the use of remote interpretation as an alternative to establishing such a service. Another report by the Secretary-General (A/54/176) said that while remote interpretation was viable, there were concerns regarding the health of interpreters and the nervous strain to which it subjected them. Even if the use of remote interpretation were possible on a limited basis, the resulting cost would be high and it would not enable those representatives of States who were not speakers of English to have personal contact with the interpreters so as to agree on the terminology to be used.

67. His delegation supported the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General to reduce the high vacancy rate in language posts. With reference to the function of reviser, he said that increased reliance on self-revision had already had an effect on the quality of translation and that the approach to translation used in United Nations documents generally tended to be literal rather than rendering the meaning.

68. With reference to setting up United Nations Web sites in the six official languages, he wondered why the Arabic language sites were not treated equally with those in other languages in the sense that their content was in image format rather than in text format and could not be processed.

69. Referring to General Assembly decision 52/470, he wondered whether the documents for the Conference on the Standardization of Geographical Names had in fact been translated into the six official languages.

70. His delegation drew the attention of the Secretariat to the necessity of completing the translation of the *Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council* into the six official languages at the same time, because of its importance. He asked about the status of the translation of the *Repertoire*, the issuance of which in its Arabic and Chinese versions had been delayed.

71. With respect to the cost-accounting system, his delegation requested that its application should not affect the level and quality of conference services, including the language services. He concluded by reaffirming that his delegation regarded the conference services as being of particular importance because the activities of the United Nations were largely dependent on them.

The meeting rose at 5.05 p.m.